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ABSTRACT

A study determined if a correlation existed between the use of predictable materials and the enhancement of reading skills. The specific reading skills in question were oral vocabulary, visual discrimination, letter and word recognition. Data were drawn from a group of first graders that represented a cross section of social, economic, and academic levels in a rural community setting. Subjects (n=15) were of Caucasian descent with English as their first language. C. L. Burke's Reading Inventory and the Reading Attitude Inventory were used in a pre/posttest procedure to gather data with t tests describing the differences. F test was used to determine if equal variance existed between the control and experimental groups. Findings suggest that the use of predictable materials is a successful alternative for reading instruction among beginning readers. (Contains 13 references and 7 tables of data.) (Author/RS)

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ENHANCING BEGINNING READERS' PERFORMANCE WITH PREDICTABLE MATERIALS

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ABSTRACT:

This study attempts to determine if a correlation exists between the use of predictable materials and the enhancement of reading skills. The specific reading skills in question are oral vocabulary, visual discrimination, letter and word recognition. The data was drawn from a group of first graders that represented a cross section of social, economic and academic levels in a rural community setting. These first graders are of caucasian descent with English as their first language. Burke's Reading Inventory and the Reading Attitude Inventory were used in a pre/post test procedure to gather data with t tests describing the differences. F test was used to determine if equal variance existed between the control and experimental groups. The data suggests that the use of predictable materials is a successful alternative for reading instruction among beginning readers.

INTRODUCTION:

Primary teacher responsible for beginning reading instruction believe that their students have enough knowledge of language to read certain books immediately based on evidence of predictability (Goodman,1976a). Goodman suggests that predictability maybe the most important charateristics of early reading material. The challenge is to find materials that cause the students to predict and confirm without getting involved in decoding. Smith (1978) contends that there is no essential difference between learning to read and reading; that is, every child must read in order to read and every time we read we learn more about reading. If the former is held as a truth, then how can we expect our beginning readers to practice a skill not learned? Bridges (1979) feels that synthetic phonics instruction, which stresses isolated letters and sound, and basal readers, which contain unnatural language patterns characteristic of pre-primers and primers, make learning to read unnecessarily difficult for the young learner. Using predictable materials to introduce reading to beginning readers may provide an advantage during initial instruction.

PURPOSE:

This study will attempt to determine; first, if there is a correlation between the use of predictable materials and the enhancement of achievement and a positive attitude toward reading among the young learner; and second, if predictable materials

enhance the development of oral vocabulary , visual discrimination and word recogrition.

QUESTIONS:

Three questions guided this investigation; namely, how would young learners exposed to predictable materials enhance their cuing systems to decipher unfamiliar words during a reading exercise?

Is the young learners attitude enhances as a result of using predictable materials?

Do predictable reading materials enhance reading skills; such as, oral vocabulary, visual discrimination and word recognition?

ASSUMPTIONS:

This study has considered two basic assumptions: If a child can use a word in sentence, s/he will be able to transfer this usage to other sentences.

If a child is able to use a word in sentence, s/he will comprehend the meaning of the word.

LIMITATIONS:

The investigators are dealing with two limits to the frame of this study: Students may simply memorize the story and not really read it.

Results of this study may not apply to students with some identifiable learning problem.

One of the first requirements for creating a literate environment is providing an abundance of opportunities for students to experience the joy of books. Repeated readings of the same book may prove to be a more valuable learning experience than realized. Once students have heard a book read several times, the sound of the language and the sense of the story become part of their stored knowledge. Bridge (1979) feels that this knowledge supports the students' early efforts to decode print and to read independently.

During the early stages of reading instruction, students slowly begin to develop decoding skills. This usually comes easier for some than others, and may be dependent upon many other related factors. When a child becomes bogged down with decoding a particular word it may actually interfere with his reading comprehension. It is also at this point that a student may develop a frustration level that may cause a teacher to label him as "disinterested". Rhodes (1981) feels that this can all be avoided by the initial use of patterned or predictable books.

Patterned books contain repetitive structures that enable readers to predict the next word or line or episode. Repeated readings of this nature allow students the opportunities to recognize high frequency words in dependable contexts and help them develop a sight vocabulary that can soon be recognized in other contexts.

Predictable books encourage reading for understanding. Bridge (1979) explains how the beginning reader utilizes his three cueing systems to process print in a meaningful context. As stated earlier, even beginning readers bring a lot of world knowledge into reading. When the material they are asked to read is familiar to them, and relevant to this background of knowledge, they are using their semantic-associational cueing system to aid their limited word recognition skills.

Studies show that by age four, children have mastered the basic syntactic structures of language. Thus, Bridge (1979) believes beginning readers possess an intuitive knowledge of acceptable ordering of words within sentences that allow them to predict and accept proper word structure. They can be considered to be using their syntactic cueing system.

The final cueing system available to mature readers is less apparent in early readers. This is the graphophonic system and includes the reader's knowledge of graphic symbol or phonics. A more proficient use of their semantic and syntactic cueing systems will help compensate for their lack of graphophonic information (Bridge, 1979).

Although the major goal of most preprimers and primers is to help readers build a core vocabulary of high frequency sight words, most selections' unnatural language and lack of story structure may actually inhibit children's ability to predict the next word or phrase, thus making learning to read more difficult (Bridge, Winograd & Haley, 1983).

When reading predictable material, children rarely read in a haltingly word-by-word manner. They are not bound by the restrictions of print and are better able to process phrases and sentences as chunks of meaning. They are role playing themselves as successful readers and are on the way to becoming successful readers of a wide range of materials.

Bridge, Winograd & Haley (1983) conducted a study to compare the effectiveness of beginning reading instruction for slow learners using predictable material (patterned books and dictated language experience stories) versus less predictable materials (a typical preprimer). Of interest were the effects of the two types of materials on the children's sight word recognition, their strategies for figuring out unfamiliar words, and their attitude toward various reading tasks. Posttests given to the students indicated that the procedures used with patterned language books and language experience stories facilitated students' acquisition of sight vocabulary during the initial stages of learning to read. The study also concluded that the use of predictable reading materials with beginning readers encouraged them to use context clues when encountering unfamiliar words, and created more positive feelings about reading aloud.

Chandler and Baghban (1986) also conducted a study of material usage to teach remedial readers in a small rural school in southern West Virginia. Two groups were formed to compare instructional materials based on a developmental, sequential basal skills approach, versus predictable books. The results

showed that the students who were taught reading with predictable books made greater gains on standardized reading achievement tests than did the students who were instructed in reading with basals.

One of the most important concepts about print for the young reader to acquire is that reading should make sense. Rhodes (1981) feels that this can be accomplished by simply reading aloud to the students and discussing the events as they naturally occur. The teacher should encourage the children to use their knowledge of the world and language to respond to the book and further support their limited word recognition skills. Patterned and predictable stories allow them to do this with limited prior knowledge. Continuing to read aloud interesting story books will help to build up students' familiarity with written language patterns and story structure.

Bridge, Winograd, and Haley (1983) feel predictable books are a valuable tool in teaching sight vocabulary. As children use their linguistic knowledge to predict, they gradually incorporate these words into their sight vocabulary. Although structure words are often the most difficult for children to learn, patterned reading material provides the necessary repetitive exposure to these words within the context of predictable language patterns for children to learn. They suggest making word cards of high frequency words that you want to teach, and utilizing these in sentence frames or clozes, to help students match the words to those in the story.

Phonic skills can also be taught by selecting several rhyming patterned books to read aloud. A word family approach can be used by picking out words which contain common phonograms or syllables. Bridge (1986) suggests using these as a source for students to build on and in writing take-offs on the original patterned book.

Alphabet and initial consonant sounds can also be introduced by reading aloud any of the numerous alphabet books available. This allows the students to familiarize the visual characteristics of the letters and the sounds they represent. The alliteration in many of these books may help develop the students' auditory discrimination of initial consonants.

Another major goal of beginning reading instruction is to build up fluency and automaticity. Combs (1987) feels that children who become good readers may have developed their concepts about reading because an adult, or significant other, modeled the process for them during lap reading experiences. She feels that teachers can continue the positive aspects of this by modeling the reading process with enlarged texts. Add to this approach a predictable story line and you provide opportunities for fluent reading even for beginning readers.

Because the structured language materials enable the reader to predict the next word, line or episode, the student is able to figure out unknown words from context. Using structured language materials for impromptu choral readings, and encouraging the students to join in during multiple rereadings allows the

students to role-play themselves as successful readers even with their initially limited sight vocabulary. As they read, and reread, many of the repetitive words will become incorporated into their internal word banks. Multiple readings also encourage the students' familiarity with and control over the content and organization of the story, resulting in greater dependence on the children's own knowledge and less dependence on teacher support (Rhodes, 1981).

METHOD:

The setting for this study was an elementary school located in a rural school system. The enrollment in kindergarten through grade five for the 1991-1992 school year was 840. The student population is proportioned 97% Caucasian and 3% mixed Asian, Hispanic, Indian and Black American. The socio-economic backgrounds of the majority of the students range from middle to upper-middle class status. Only 15% of the students qualified for the free or reduced lunch program.

In general, children are randomly assigned to classrooms, but about 35% of the placements are by honored parental requests. New students are placed in the classroom containing the lowest number of pupils. During the 1991-1992 school year there were six first grade classrooms. All classes were self-contained for academic instruction.

During this study a group of fifteen students selected from two classrooms were chosen. Children were selected based upon

their status of reading instruction at the close of the first semester of the current year. These children made up the lowest reading group in each respective classroom. Each group had just finished the second preprimer and were ready for instruction in the third preprimer.

Out of the fifteen total participants in the study, three students had previously been retained in kindergarten. All three of these students plus one additional student were screened for specific learning disabilities and recommended for further testing.

PROCEDURES AND MATERIALS:

During the first week of this study, a total of fifteen students selected from two classrooms were identified as reading below grade level. Seven students in one classroom were selected to become the control group while the remaining eight students, members of a separate class, were the test group.

Each reading group had just completed the second preprimer in the county adopted reading series, *Series R Macmillan Reading*, published by the Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. of New York. They were now ready to be instructed in the next preprimer, titled *We Can Read*.

For purposes of comparison, each group received approximately thirty minutes of daily instruction for a total of eight weeks utilizing two different reading programs. Children in the control group continued instruction in their present classroom, under the direction of their own teacher, utilizing

the current basal series. They continued in the preprimer, *We Can Read*, containing six short stories and two poems. Thirty new instructional-vocabulary words (excluding names) were introduced during instruction in this book. Six additional words were listed as derivatives of words previously introduced. The thirty-six newly introduced words are repeated a total of 216 times throughout the book.

In teaching the control group the teacher followed the teaching suggestions contained in the basal manual. For each of the six stories a three part lesson is suggested. Part I is called Introducing the Lesson and involves introducing new words in and out of context.

Part II, Reading for Comprehension, is designed to build background and set a purpose for reading. Two options are given for reading and discussing the story. The teacher may choose to have the children read the entire selection silently and then discuss the listed comprehension questions for discussion of the selection as a whole. An alternative is to direct the children in a page-by-page reading utilizing the comprehension questions placed under each page in the teacher's manual. Both methods are designed to allow the students to demonstrate skills utilizing literal, interpretive, critical and creative thinking.

Part III, Pacing Skill Development, contains activities designed to teach and reinforce priority skills. These may include a variety of comprehension, language and decoding skills.

Each story selection concludes with optional enriching activities suggested to extend the lesson through art, drama and writing.

Children need to feel successful as readers to develop positive attitudes and further their self-confidence. Allowing the student to take home the story book for a weekend helped promote this successful feeling. Students were encouraged to read and reread the book to their parents, siblings and friends. This was always the most exciting learning experience for the students as they were able to share their accomplishments with someone else.

To initiate the program, each student was given a sight word inventory composed of the 30 target words to be instructed in the *We Can Read* plus 39 additional nontarget words. The nontarget words were chosen as high frequency Dolch words common at the preprimer level. A posttest of the same 69 words was given at the conclusion of the study.

Students were also individually interviewed before and after the study to determine specific strategies used during reading. A modified version of Burke's Reading Inventory (Burke, 1980) was used. Of particular interest was how they would respond strategically when encountering an unfamiliar word or phrase.

Finally, students were given a short researcher-made attitude survey in pre and postsessions. This survey was used to determine how the students' attitudes towards reading and various reading tasks were affected by the materials used during their group instruction.

To determine whether or not there was a significant difference between the two groups in the number of target and nontarget words a statistical analysis was performed. Due to the small sample size, an F test was utilized to see if the two groups could be compared. A Student's t distribution test was then performed to note any significant differences in the average number of recognized sight words between the two groups.

Any differences between the pre and post testing of Burke's Reading Interview and the attitude survey were compared and verbally discussed. A graph charting the differences in students' attitudes towards various reading tasks following the study was plotted.

FINDINGS:

To determine whether or not there was a difference in the number of target and nontarget words learned by the two groups, the number of recognized words in the pretest was compared to the number of words recognized in the posttest. The difference is noted as a positive or negative change. (See Table 1 thru 4.)

Analysis of these changes indicated that there is little to no change in the number of words learned in the control group (Target mean = .143, Nontarget mean = 1.286). However, there is a significant difference noted in the test group (Target mean = 9.625, Nontarget mean = 5.750). (See Table 5.) Due to the small sample size, it is important to determine if inferences can

be made as to this increase. Therefore the following procedures were used:

First an F test was used to determine whether the two population variances are equal. A null hypothesis was formed stating that they are equal. The critical value of the F distribution at a 95% confidence interval was found to be 5.7. Calculation of the F values for the target and nontarget variances revealed 2.388 and .379 respectively. Since these values are within range of the F distribution critical values, it fails to reject the null hypothesis. Therefore, the variances are assumed to be equal..

Table 1

Results of Sight Word Evaluation - Test Group

	TARGET WORDS		
STUDENTS	PRE	POST	CHANGE
Mark	22	27	5
Andy	25	30	5
Jules	8	26	18
Kenny	16	26	10
Tabitha	1	10	9
Darren	16	21	5
Bruce	10	27	17
Evan	12	20	8

Note: There were 30 target words and 39 nontarget words.

Table 11

Results of Sight Word Evaluation - Test Group

	NONTARGET WORDS		
STUDENTS	PRE	POST	CHANGE
Mark	33	36	3
Andy	35	38	3
Jules	33	36	3
Kenny	31	39	8
Tabitha	14	20	6
Darren	28	36	8
Bruce	29	37	8
Evan	27	34	7

Note: There were 30 target words and 39 nontarget words.

Table 111

Results of Sight Word Evaluation - Control Group

	TARGET WORDS		
STUDENTS	PRE	POST	CHANGE
Spencer	13	10	-3
Deanna	15	17	2
Samantha	8	9	1
Jared	15	17	2
Ryan	11	16	5
Chris	20	19	-1
Joshua	25	20	-5

Note: There were 30 target words and 39 nontarget words.

Table IV

Results of Sight Word Evaluation - Control Group

	NONTARGET WORDS		
STUDENTS	PRE	POST	CHANGE
Spencer	27	26	-1
Deanna	31	32	1
Samantha	26	29	3
Jared	38	36	-2
Ryan	23	32	9
Chris	35	36	1
Joshua	37	35	-2

Note: There were 30 target words and 39 nontarget words.

Table v

Mean Pretest, Posttest, and Difference Scores for Test and Control Group

TEST GROUP						
	Pretest		Postest		Mean Difference	
	Score	S.D.	Score	S.D.	Score	S.D.
Target Words	13.75	7.72	23.78	6.32	9.63	5.24
Nontarget Words	28.75	6.56	34.5	6.01	5.75	2.38
CONTROL GROUP						
	Pretest		Posttest		Mean Difference	
	Score	S.D.	Score	S.D.	Score	S.D.
Target Words	15.29	5.68	15.43	4.28	.143	3.39
Nontarget Words	31.00	5.86	32.29	3.77	1.29	3.86

Next a Student's t distribution test was performed on the means of both groups to see if there was a difference. A null hypothesis was formed stating that they are equal. The critical value of the t distribution at a 95% confidence interval was found to be 2.16. Calculation of the t values for the target and nontarget means revealed 4.08 and 2.73 respectively. Therefore the null hypothesis is rejected and indicates that there is a significant difference between the means of the two groups.

To detect any differences between the control and test groups' reading strategies when encountering a reading difficulty, a modified version of Burke's Reading Inventory was given before and after the study. The question most relevant to this particular study was "When you are reading and you come to something you don't know, what do you do?" Typical responses prior to the study included "sound it out", "guess", and "ask someone". Six out of seven in the control group initially responded with "sound it out". One student felt it was best to "guess" the questionable word. Six students in the test group also felt it best to try and "sound it out", while two would "ask the teacher".

At the end of the study all seven of the students in the control group responded to this same question with "sound it out". One student did feel that if this didn't reveal the correct word, she would then make a good "guess". It is interesting to note the change in the responses of the students in the test group. Five of the eight students who had used

predictable reading materials also reported they would try to "sound it out", but added that they would also keep reading to the end of the sentence, looking for additional clues. Two students reported that they would say "blank" or "um" and go on, while only one student responded with just "sound it out". It is important to note that one student also suggested looking at pictures to help figure out the unfamiliar word.

In general, the results of this evaluation indicate that the control group was still solely dependent on their graphophonic cueing system for deciphering unfamiliar words in context. On the other hand, the test group appeared to be utilizing a variety of strategies during their reading. Using additional context clues and looking at pictures demonstrated a more sophisticated use of their semantic and syntactic cueing systems in addition to their graphophonic system.

To determine whether a student's attitude towards reading would differ depending on their type of learning material, an attitudinal survey was given prior to and after the study. Although the responses to the pretest in both groups were quite similar, they differed on particular questions following the study. Of particular interest were questions number 3 and 8, "How do you feel when you are asked to read aloud in class?", and "How do you feel when you come to a word you don't know?". Those who had been reading predictable materials responded with more positive feelings on both questions than the students who had been reading out of the basals. (See Tables 6 and 7.) The

Table VI

Reading Attitude Survey - Test Group

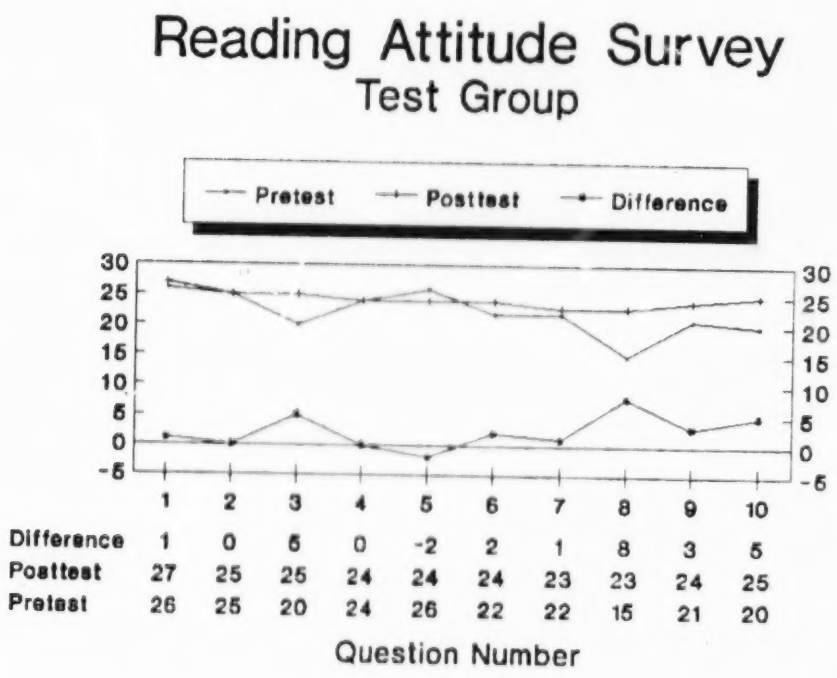
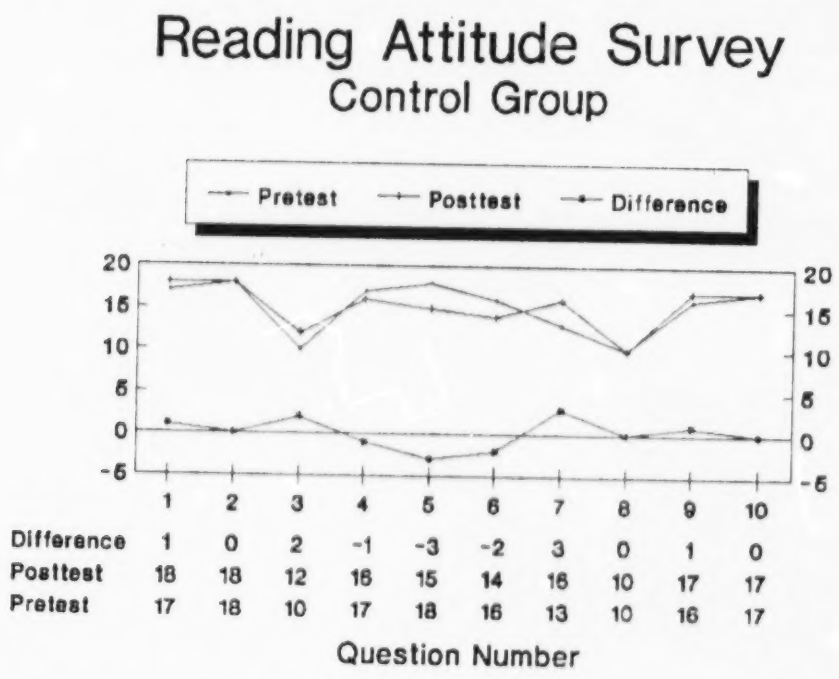


Table VII

Reading Attitude Survey - Control Group



control group reported no change in attitude concerning unfamiliar words encountered during reading, while the test group reported a substantial gain in positive feelings. It appears that the students in the test group are now more confident in deciphering unfamiliar words in context. Apparently the choral and rereadings of the predictable materials provided a secure and enjoyable environment for learning to take place.

Question number 6, "How do you feel when you read aloud to a reading partner?" also provided varying responses from both groups. While the test group reported more positive feelings following the study, the control group actually digressed toward more negative feelings.

SUMMARY:

By introducing young children to literacy with predictable books and materials, it was hypothesized that students would develop success and enjoyment of reading in the early years of schooling. Three questions were formulated during this study to investigate the potential outcome of this hypothesis. Summary responses to each question are provided below:

Question 1: *Would young readers who participated in the predictable material reading program heighten word recognition better than readers who where taught reading through a more traditional basal approach?*

Student participants in the test group, receiving reading instruction utilizing predictable materials, did learn significantly more target and nontarget words. The average student in the test group recognized nine more target and 6 more nontarget words after completing the study. On the other hand, the average student in the control group recognized no more target words and only one more nontarget word upon completion of the study program. Not only did the participants in the control group learn fewer words during the course of this study, but in fact some students appeared to regress in word recognition. This suggests that in spite of the fact that the main objective of a basal preprimer is to facilitate aquisition of a core vocabulary it may have inhibited, rather than enhanced, their sight word growth.

Question 2: *How would young readers who participated in the predictable material reading program use their cueing sustems to decipher unfamiliar words when reading?*

In general, the results of Burke's Reading Interview indicate the the control group was still soley dependent on their graphophonic cueing system for deciphering unfamiliar words is context. On the other hand, the test group appeared to be utilizing a variety of strategies during their reading. Using additional verbal and visual clues demonstrated a more sophisticated use of all three of their cueing systems.

Question 3: *What effect would a predictable material reading program have on the students' attitude toward various reading tasks, including reading aloud?*

This researcher found that the students reading out of the predictable materials reported more positive feelings about reading aloud to other individuals and in class in general. The test group also showed substantial increase in positive feelings when encountering unfamiliar words during reading. It appears that their confidence in deciphering may come from the secure and enjoyable environment predictable materials supply.

There are two main types of predictable reading material available to early readers. These are dictated language experience stories and patterned books. Language experience stories originate from the children's own experiences. They are dictated to the teacher in their own personal language.

Predictability is eminent since they already know what the story says.

The second type of predictable reading material is the patterned or structured language book. Rhodes (1981) outlines several characteristics of predictable, or patterned books, that allow most children to feel successful and competent at reading in the early years of schooling.

First, and most importantly, good predictable books should contain repetitive or cumulative patterns that allow readers to predict the next word, line or episode. They also will contain familiar concepts to young children, and a good match between the text and its illustrations.

Another good characteristic of predictable books is the familiarity of the story or story line to the child. Most children have a good start of story structure based on background knowledge of folk and fairy tales and songs.

Familiar sequences, such as days of the week, numbers or the alphabet may often be another characteristic of a predictable book (Rhodes, 1981). Familiarity with all of these characteristics permits children to read printed materials with a confidence not possible when words or sound-symbol relationships are emphasized.

CONCLUSIONS:

Students can demonstrate progress as readers without the use of typical preprimers as the program core. Less structured, but more predictable, literature-based programs can provide the necessary sight vocabulary to further effective reading instruction.

An effective predictable reading program can encourage children to use a variety of context clues when encountering unfamiliar words during reading.

An effective reading program utilizing predictable books and materials can create positive feelings about reading aloud and various other reading associated tasks.

It cannot be concluded, based on this study alone, that a predictable material reading program is a better method of teaching over the more traditional basal reader approach, but this study does support the findings of Bridge, Winograd, and Haley (1983) and does suggest that the use of predictable books and language experience stories is a successful alternative for reading instruction for beginning readers.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

In addition to the advantages of using predictable materials directly relative to a reading program, there are other instructional uses of patterned books. A major use is as a resource for writing. Patterned books can serve as a skeleton, or basic format, for children to use as they improvise by

changing the theme of the story. They can select words and phrases, relative to the theme, to change to create their own versions of the story.

The teacher may also choose to initially introduce the book through its illustrations alone. The children can predict the text of the story and create their own chart story based on the pictures alone. Follow-up soon afterwards with the reading of the book. Children may be surprised to see how closely or differently their story is in relation to the author's version.

Experiences outside of reading and writing can also further the children's exposure to patterned books. Creative artwork and drama can also be few of many activities that should accompany each selection to provide children with a good balanced language arts program. Heald-Taylor (1987) contends that good literature can be an excellent basis for language arts instruction and rewarding to both students and teachers, since both have shared the wondrous world of imagination and fantasy of real authors. As a result, teachers not only share in their students instruction in learning how to read, but also "...celebrate their youngsters getting addicted to literature" (Heald-Taylor, 1987, p. 661).

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